

LGBT Center Central PA History Project

Discovering stories
of extraordinary lives



Oral History Interviewer Training

- Welcome and introductions
- Overview of LGBT Center of Central PA History Project
- Introduction to oral history
- Scheduling the interview
- Preparing for the interview
- Guidelines for oral history interviewing
- Interview prompts and topics
- Documenting the interview
- After the interview
- Demonstration and practice
- Questions and evaluation

Introduction

- History Project started in August 2012
 - Story Circle presentation for Aging with Pride
 - Widespread interest led to creation of a history project
 - Has grown to become one of the most successful initiatives of the LGBT Center



Mission

- To discover, document, collect, preserve and present the stories of LGBT history in central PA
- To find LGBT people willing to share their stories and artifacts
- To encourage LGBT people to learn about their history



Discover

Through outreach efforts, we are finding people willing to share their stories and artifacts

- LGBT events
- Publicity
- Word of mouth

You're
History



Document

- Video oral history interviews
 - Created a questionnaire/prompts
 - Developed a volunteer training program
 - Created a list of interested narrators
 - Conduct video oral history interviews
 - Do transcriptions



Collect

- Started collecting documents and artifacts
 - Photographs
 - Personal papers
 - Archival documents from LGBT Organizations
 - T-shirts, buttons, pins, flags, signs and more



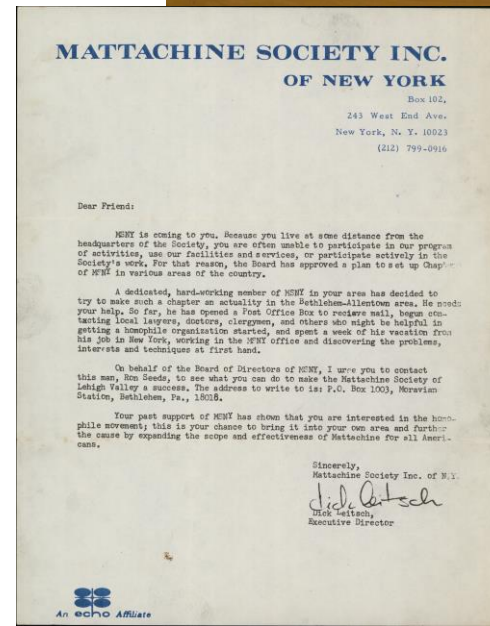
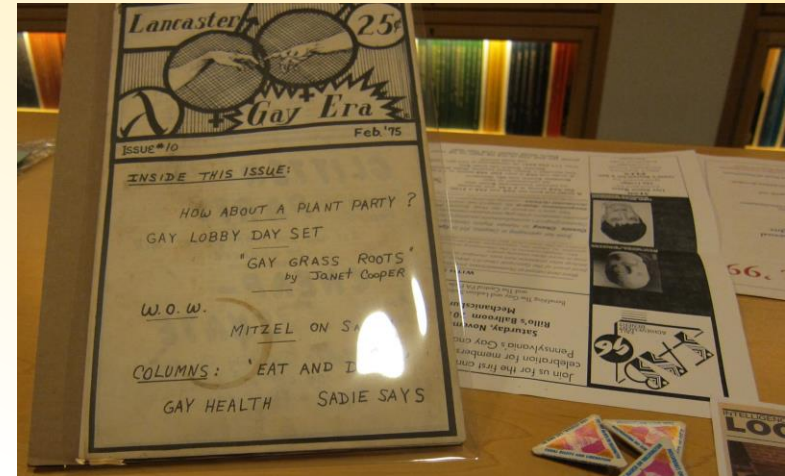
Collect

- Collection has grown rapidly
 - More than 135 oral history interviews with transcriptions
 - More than 90 linear feet of archival documents and artifacts



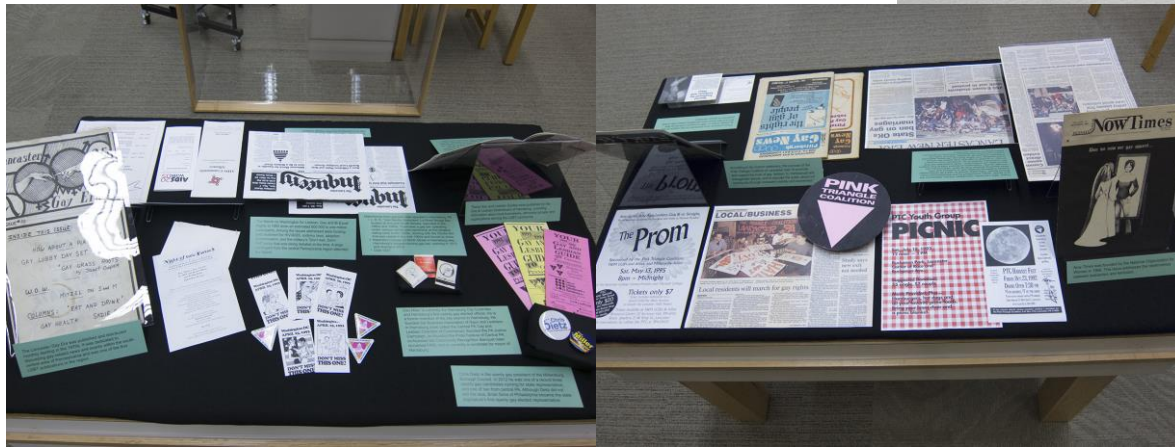
Preserve

- Developed partnership with Dickinson College Archives and Special Collections
 - Provide professional archival care
 - Catalogue, describe and arrange collections
 - Provide storage and access for researchers
 - Opportunities to collaborate on exhibits, original research and publications



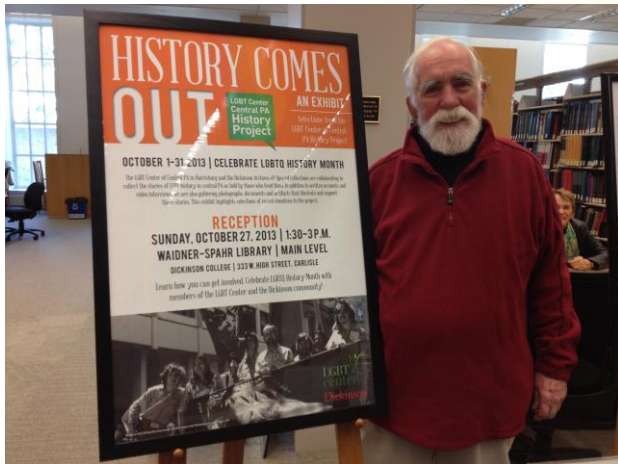
Present

- Exhibits of artifacts and historical documents
 - First exhibit October 2013 at Dickinson College
 - Annual collaborative art/history exhibit started 2014
- Future digital exhibits, archives and tours on the web
- Narrative history putting stories in context and timeline



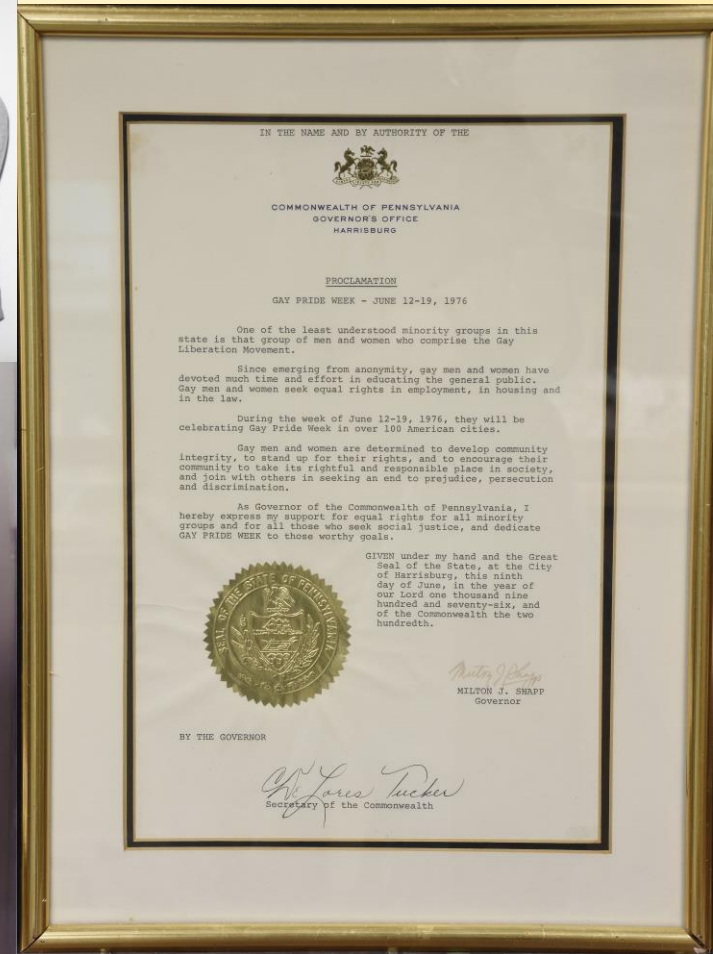
Present

- Examples of exhibits



Present

- Examples of exhibits



Present

- Examples of exhibits

LGBT Center
Central PA
History Project



LGBT center

Present

- Permanent display case at LGBT Center
 - Rotating exhibits of new artifact and archival donations
 - Thematic exhibits connected to special events or programs



Present

- Quarterly LGBT history programs



- **Programs - Story Circles**
- **Exhibits**
- **Web site**
- **College course projects and internships**



What we are learning

- LGBT people in central PA have lived extraordinary lives and have
 - Experienced all types of discrimination
 - Lived through violence and harassment
 - Persisted and persevered through adversity
 - Formed long term relationships and families
 - Succeeded in careers, community involvement
 - Created places to socialize and find each other
 - Organized for LGBT equality even *before* Stonewall
 - Developed an entire infrastructure and network of community organizations



Why is this important

- LGBT history has been ignored, destroyed, not valued
 - Mainstream museums and archives have largely ignored or been unaware of this history or avoided it as being too controversial
 - LGBT people have not kept documents and artifacts out of fear of discovery or lack of value of their own history
 - Families finding this material in estates of LGBT people have destroyed or disposed of the material out of shame or disinterest or thinking no one would find it of value
 - Some governments and cultural institutions throughout the world have destroyed evidence of LGBT life
- No one else is telling the stories and history of the LGBT community in central PA
- LGBT people in this region should learn about their history because it is the foundation on which their future is built

Introduction to Oral History

- What is oral history?
- Why is oral history important?
- Why is it important for LGBTQ history?
- Principles and standards
 - Commitments to narrators
 - Standards of scholarship
 - Preservation of the interviews & related materials
- General principles
 - Create an in-depth account of personal experience and reflections
 - Inform narrators about the nature and purpose of their interview
 - Insure informed consent by the narrator
 - Interviewers are prepared to ask informed historical questions

Scheduling the Interview

- When you are ready to interview someone
 - Find a trained partner to go with you and decide who will run the video equipment and who will ask questions.
 - Email Amanda Arbour at the LGBT Center (aarbour@centralpalgbtcenter.org). Request a name and contact info from the oral history narrators waiting list
 - When you receive this from Amanda, contact the narrator explaining who you are, that you are a volunteer with the History Project and the purpose of the contact.
 - Once you have arrived at a mutually agreeable date, time and location, contact Amanda and reserve the video equipment

Preparing for the Interview

- The interviewer should try to have a phone conversation with the narrator in advance of the interview to get some idea of the background of the narrator and areas of significant connection to the local LGBT community to emphasize in the interview. In lieu of a phone call, talk to the narrator during the video set up to get some ideas of what to emphasize in the interview.
- Research/review material relevant to the time period/context of the narrator's life. For example, watch *Before Stonewall*, *After Stonewall* and/or other documentaries of the period covered by the narrator's life.
- Ask the narrator if they have old photos, artifacts, memorabilia, etc. that they might want to share on camera or use as part of the telling of their story.
- The videographer should go over the procedures for setting up the video equipment and practice to be sure they are able to do the set up again at the interview efficiently and correctly.

Guidelines for Interviewing

- Conduct interview in a quiet place with minimal distractions
- Agree to approximate length of interview in advance
- Use standard interview form of prompts and topics and formulate questions within these topics
- Ask creative, probing and how/when/why questions; avoid yes/no questions
- Keep questions short; avoid multi-part questions.
- Allow narrator time to think/reflect on a question before responding
- Avoid sharing your opinions or leading questions that may suggest answers
- Actively listen to responses and think of follow up questions
- Take limited notes; maintain maximum eye contact/attention
- Encourage with nods of head and facial expressions rather than audible responses of “yes” or “uh huh”
- Let the narrator move their story in directions they choose, but be prepared to go back to certain topics that may need more detail

Guidelines for Interviewing

- Handling emotional situations
 - Show compassion and understanding
 - Allow narrator time to collect thoughts, regain composure
 - If they ask, turn the recording equipment off. If they want to continue with their story, ask them if they want it to be recorded and then proceed according to their wishes.
 - Remember, it is their story and they have final say over what is in the interview.

Interview Prompts and Topics

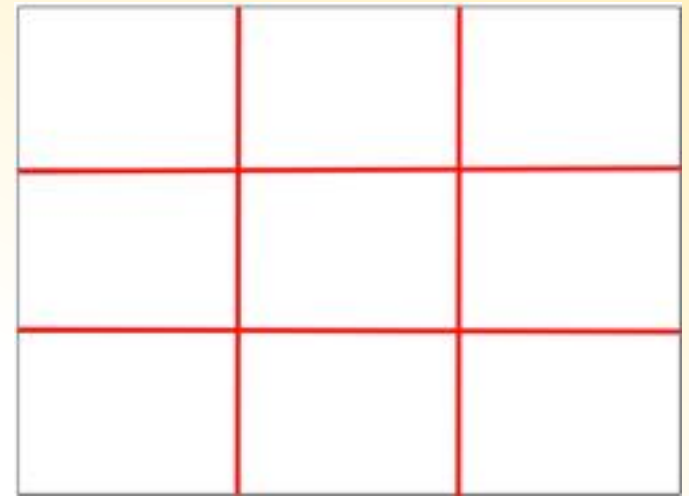
- Be sure to use the standard form of prompts and topics provided by the History Project
- Be sure to read the introduction, customized with the information filled in the blanks for this particular interview.
- Be sure to ask permission to record the interview.
- Ask the narrator to say and spell their full name.
- Start with date and place of birth.
- Follow the basic outline of prompts and topics, skipping any that do not apply and adding any that are particular to the narrator's background and story.

Documenting the Interview

- Try to eliminate or reduce background noise to the extent possible.
- Select a location with a pleasant background for the narrator to be filmed in front of.
- Make sure natural or artificial light is falling on the face of the narrator (avoid back-lighting that results in the face in shadow).
- Set up the camera to be at around eye level with the narrator, or slightly lower.
- Only the narrator should be in the view, not the interviewer or videographer.

Documenting the Interview

- Frame the narrator so there is more space in the direction they are facing (rule of thirds; “nose space”).
- Adjust as needed for narrators who are more prone to shifting positions, speaking with their hands, moving around in their seat as they speak, etc. by making the view frame larger.
- Do a test recording to be sure the equipment is operating properly.
- Monitor the interview for sound levels, visual clarity, and technical problems.



After the Interview

- At the end of the interview, thank the narrator for sharing their time and their story.
- Ask the narrator if you covered everything they wanted to say and decide if an additional interview is needed at a later date.
- Turn off the recording equipment (videographer can proceed with taking down/packing up the equipment).
- Ask the narrator to read, complete and sign the Consent Form for the interview and give it to you before you leave.
- Ask the narrator if they have old photos, artifacts, documents, memorabilia, etc. that they would like to donate to the History Project (a Deed of Gift form will be included in your interview packet for the narrator to fill out to complete a donation).
- Give the narrator other general information about the History Project from your interviewer packet.
- After you leave, write and send a thank you note to the narrator (blank note provided in your packet; or email).
- Return the video equipment and Consent Form to the LGBT Center (or Dickinson Archives) promptly so that it is available to other volunteers/interns.

Demonstration and Practice

- Setting up the video equipment
- Running the video equipment
- Taking down the video equipment
- Practice



Questions and Evaluation

- Any final questions?
- Please complete evaluation form and leave it with us before you leave.

LGBT Center Central PA History Project

Thank you!

history@centralpalgbtcenter.org

717-920-9534

centralpalgbtcenter.org/lgbt-history-project

facebook.com/LGBTcentralpa

